WOW: Word Of the Week

Freedom… (Principle)

August 5, 2026

Reading the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, it seems the Corinthian church had more than their fair share of problems, especially for a relatively new church. When you have problems, you need solutions. Some had written to Paul seeking advice. The questions Paul addresses in the first half of the book – division and human allegiances, dependence on human wisdom and power, worldliness, tolerating immorality, lawsuits between Christiains, sexual immorality, marital concerns, meat sacrificed to idols – all had potential for generating conflict within the church. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul begins to set forth a principle base to deal with the problems. Problems are best resolved by principles – agreement on the guidelines and norms of the Christian life.

Paul says that he uses the "freedom principle" to guide life. His freedom allows him to enslave himself for God's purposes. He uses his freedom to identify with others, not to draw lines and separations. His freedom opens possibilities for saving as many as possible for the sake of the gospel. Paul's freedom depreciates his rights, increases his responsibilities, demands self-discipline, and leads to stricter living.

How different than the self-focused freedom many seek in our world today. Christian freedom is not a freedom focused on self but a freedom focused on God's will, not a demand for rights but a willingness to do whatever is necessary for the sake of the gospel. (*Dwelling in the Word*, p. 156).

The New Testament echoes the contrast. "Freedom from" vs. "freedom for." The big question for a Christian is, Freedom for what? Freedom to do what? Paul's freedom principle contrasts sharply with the freedom many want today. The "freedom principle" Pau describes lets me give up my rights to benefit others, to put minimal resources toward self in order to share the gospel more broadly. Paul describes "freedom from sin" as "being enslaved to God" (Rom. 6:22).

Freedom / liberty is not only a noun – something one has or does not have. Freedom/liberty is a principle. Paul says he is free to make himself a slave. An older saying is memorable. "Everyone is a slave to something. The question is, to what are you enslaved?"

This week's challenge: when you talk about, pray about, make plans focused on freedom, be sure in include "freedom to." "Freedom from" may be good and desirable. "Freedom for" and "freedom to" are wonderfully fulfilling. And wonderfully freeing!